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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000310

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2020

TAGS: PREL PGOV IS

SUBJECT: FM LIEBERMAN INDICTMENT ON HOLD, FOR NOW

REF: 09 TEL AVIV 1838 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Despite the formal recommendation by the Israeli National Police on August 2, 2009 that then-Attorney General Menachem Mazuz indict Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman on bribery, money laundering, obstruction of justice, and other charges, Mazuz left office January 28 without filing an indictment. Mazuz has been replaced as Attorney General by Yehuda Weinstein, a prominent criminal defense lawyer. Weinstein is generally considered to be an honest litigator, but his sole expertise lies in criminal defense, and his appointment as Attorney General therefore came as a surprise to many.

¶2. (C) Ari Shavit, a prominent Israeli journalist for the newspaper Ha'aretz and an ardent supporter of Mazuz's efforts to root out corruption among Israel's political leaders, conducted an exclusive interview with Mazuz just prior to his departure from office. Shavit told PolCouns that Mazuz had been close to wrapping up the investigation into the allegations against Lieberman and had planned to indict but had simply run out of time. Shavit thought that Mazuz had "arranged it" so that Yehuda Weinstein would have to first review the file but then make the Lieberman case his top priority. Shavit predicted that Weinstein would likely be able to complete his review of the Lieberman investigation within about six months, at the end of which Weinstein would issue an indictment of Lieberman.

¶3. (C) Comment: Israeli pundits began predicting a criminal indictment of Lieberman and Lieberman's resignation as Foreign Minister almost as soon as Lieberman assumed his current post. Lieberman's conduct as Foreign Minister continues to attract sharp criticism from the Israeli establishment, with the latest round touched off by Lieberman's public remarks last week about war with Syria, but Lieberman shows no sign of planning to step down. In an interview that Lieberman gave last September, shortly after the police recommended his indictment, he mused about having achieved his political goals and therefore being ready to leave office. In contrast, after the furor over his Syria remarks last week, Lieberman (in characteristic style) called his critics "losers" and insisted that he would carry out all of his campaign promises.

Cunningham